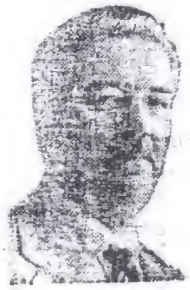
Bul 4/14/74

Taylor Grant—An Opinion

Nixon's Hard-to-Believe Jaunts



Everybody likes to get away from home once in a while. Richard Multihouse Nixon more than most. Possibly because he has more homes to get away from.

His most recent trip to the Thumb of Michigan may have given the practice of whistle-stopping a new and irreducible meaninglessness. It may also have yanked from the ranks of euphemism another old political term — campaign trail — and restored some of its original meaning, for the first time since the Iron Horse made politicking by foot obsolete.

Coming as it did, hard on the heels of Mr. Nixon's rollicking journey to Sad Paree, Our Tricky Interdictor has once again suggested that his mounting troubles have done little or nothing to diminish his bad taste or his preoccupation with the picayune.

White House spokesmen insist, of course, that both of last week's tours were rousing successes. If Variety, the show-biz bible, were covering such matters, it might have compromised with a headline like: "Nix Clicks In Sticks, But NG in Paree.

However, the French newspaper, Le Monde, through a rare front page editorial, has correctly called world attention to the Nixonian knack for associating himself with the wrong place, time, and thing.

In Paris, nearly everybody reads Le Monde. And what they were all reading — while General Haig was telling American news services how much Europe loved our leader — was some scathing criticism under the caption "The Nixon Festival."

The editorial described with embarrassing detail President Nixon's smiling, joking, handshaking, hobnobbing with a few heads of state, and with assorted bunches of Parisian bystanders, who had been led to believe the purpose of the Nixon visit was to join in honoring the memory of their late president, George Pompidou.

Le Monde saw "loud feverishness and clumsiness" in the President's behavior. Whatever others may call it, there was no lessening of it when the scene shifted from France's capital to Michigan's thumb.

Apparently, Our Smiling Sojourner was determined to make an all-out response to James Sparling, candidate for Congress in Michigan's Eighth District, the *only* Republican to invite Presidential participation in a local campaign this year.

With that special spirit that only a well-oiled Administration machine can muster — which is to say, sort of synthetic — the Nixon entourage moved in on spots where no President has ever trod before. It must have been satisfying to this particular President's passion for registering certain "firsts" in history.

Trouble is, it had to be noted that *most* Americans had never trod these places before. Along what could more fittingly be described as the dustiest campaign train in history,

A Bulletin Guest Column

Our Tireless Traveler talked to groups in hamlets of such sparse reknown as Deford, Hemans, Cass City and Snover. Not to mention Elmer and Bad Axe.

It all seemed a little hard to believe as Dan Rather reported it, straight faced and square jawed, as a listener kept waiting for the punch line.

For a second or two, it seemed that the utter unreality of the story might be spoiled by the mention of Sandusky, which I seem to have remembered as an Ohio town of some thirty odd thousand. But no, the reference was to Sandusky, the seat of Sanilac County, Michigan. Population about two thousand, although police estimated the crowd which gathered there to hear the President at around ten thousand.

It was proved some time ago—during the peace marches held in New York and Washington—that police estimates of crowds are about as reliable as appraisals of vice-presidential papers. In this instance, however, let us not quibble.

Even though not a single town along the route had a population of more than three thousand, why begrudge anyone a guess that at one place, ten thousand turned out? These days, the camera crews of three major networks can swell the size of any gathering, in more ways than one.

More interesting than any figures, large or small, was the lettering on some of the signs held by those who showed up to greet the Vacillating Visitor.

There were, of course, an expected number of placards of the sort that have been prepared in the past by the President's advance men. "Hang In There." And there were a good many of those "God Loves Nixon" signs carried by mere mortals of Michigan, who would intimate that they have communication with some Special Source to which I could never aspire.

But it was the other signs that showed up on TV screens that were at once more surprising, more believable, and more picturesque.

To see the currently popular "Jail to the Chief" slogan in such small crowds and faraway places indicates that, at long last, some of the opposition to the current Administration could be as well organized as the White House scenario writers. But I was even more impressed by the rural, believable quality of the cards which read—in somewhat uneven scrawl—"Pay Your Taxes" and "Abdicate With Honor."

Somehow, the Michigan trip seemed to convey, as much as any recent pseudo-event, the depths to which Richard Multihouse Nixon has fallen.

Someday, we may be reminded of one more sign held by one of the rural folks along the last route saying: "Why Did You Have To Come Here? It Has Been Such A Nice Place 'Til Now."

Hang in there, people of Michigan. Be assured he will not pass your way again.